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U.S. House of Representatives

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ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515

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Keeping Faith With America's Veterans: Congressional Record of Accomplishments: 2001 to 2004

VETERANS HEALTH CARE

Record budget funding for veterans health care programs

- Congress has passed, and President Bush has signed, record increases in spending on veterans health care programs each of the last three years.
- Total appropriations for veterans health care has risen from \$20 billion in 2001 to over \$26 billion this year, an increase of over 30% in three years.
- Overall, VA's budget has risen an average of almost 9% per year since 2001.
- VA will be able to provide health care services to over 5 million veterans this year; that's 1.2 million more veterans receiving VA medical care than three years earlier.
- Passed new legislation authorizing over \$360 million for new VA hospital construction, expansion and repair.
- Lowered inpatient hospitalization costs for many veterans and revised health care eligibility guidelines to account for regional differences in the cost of living.
- Created new incentives programs to recruit and retain nurses and other health care professionals.

Improved health care services for veterans

- Expanded VA health care eligibility and the health services offered by VA to include:
 - ◆ *Chiropractic care;*
 - ◆ *Dental care for former POWs;*
 - ◆ *Service dogs for severely disabled veterans; and*
 - ◆ *Project 112/SHAD veterans and Filipino WWII veterans.*
- Increased earmarked funding for mental health care programs to \$25 million.
- Codified independent oversight of VA medical research programs to ensure patient safety.

DISABLED VETERANS COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION

Historic breakthrough on concurrent receipt:

- Military retirees who were injured in combat, while training for combat, or who are 50% or more service-disabled, will for the first time be able to receive retirement benefits concurrently with veterans disability compensation.
- As a result, more than 250,000 disabled military retirees will receive \$22 billion in additional retirement payments over the next ten years; \$57 billion over the next 20 years.
- For a 100% service-connected disabled veteran eligible for military retirement benefits, this could mean up to \$167,000 in additional benefit payments over the next ten years.

Increased and Expanded Eligibility for Disability Compensation and Pensions

- Provided 6.7% cost-of-living (COLA) increases over three years for disability compensation and pensions.
- Increased Medal of Honor monthly pensions from \$600 to \$1,000.
- Expanded eligibility for disability compensation to include type 2 Diabetes, Gulf War related illnesses (*including fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, chronic multi-symptom illness*), children of certain Vietnam veterans who develop Spina Bifida, former POWs with certain conditions, and WWII Filipino veterans.
- Provided survivors of disabled veterans with full accrued benefits if the disabled veteran dies before his compensation claim is adjudicated.

Strengthened Programs to Rehabilitate Disabled Veterans

- Increased specially adapted housing grant from \$43,000 to \$50,000 for severely disabled veterans.
- Increased specially adapted automobile grants for severely disabled veterans from \$8,000 to \$11,000.

WIDOWS AND DEPENDENTS OF VETERANS

- Restored eligibility for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC), VA home loan guarantees and education benefits for surviving spouses who remarry after the age of 57.
- Reinstated CHAMPVA health benefits for surviving spouses who remarry after age 55.
- Allowed the remarried surviving spouse of a veteran to be eligible for burial in a VA national cemetery based on his or her marriage to the veteran.
- Increased Survivors' and Dependents' Educational allowance (widows and dependent children) from \$588 to \$670 per month and to \$788 per month, effective July 1, 2004.

- Expanded the Servicemembers Group Life Insurance (SGLI) program to provide life insurance coverage to spouses and children of servicemembers.

SHRINES & MEMORIALS

Honoring and Remembering Fallen Heroes

- Authorized the construction of 6 new national cemeteries and provided funding for 12 national cemeteries in high-need areas.
- Made permanent the State Cemetery Grants Program, which assists states in establishing veterans cemeteries.
- Increased the burial and funeral allowance for service-connected deaths from \$1,500 to \$2,000 and from \$300 to \$500 for nonservice-connected deaths.
- Doubled burial plot allowances to \$300, and expanded the number of veterans' families eligible for burial plot allowances.
- Expedited construction of the new World War II Memorial in Washington, DC, which will be dedicated on May 29, 2004.

EDUCATION

Modernizing Veterans Education Programs

- Enacted historic 46% increase in the GI Bill educational benefit, raising the lifetime education benefit from \$23,400 (\$650 per month) to \$35,460 (\$985 per month), an increase of \$12,060 for participating veterans to pursue their education or job training objectives.
- Authorized veterans to use GI Bill benefits in an accelerated manner for short-term, academically-intensive programs.
- Restored any lost education benefits for veterans whose education was interrupted due to activation, as well as for National Guard members.

JOBS

Helping Veterans Find and Create Good Jobs

- Increased GI Bill on-the-job training and apprenticeship benefits by a record 66% over three years, from \$487 to \$738 per month.
- Substantially enhanced federal law requiring federal contractors to provide veterans a preference in hiring.

- Passed comprehensive legislation to reform veterans' job placement programs with new accountability measures.
- Created the President's National Hire Veterans Committee to encourage employers to consider the special skills and training of military veterans.
- Expanded GI Bill eligibility for self-employment and entrepreneurship courses.
- Created new federal contracting authority to allow sole-sourcing and preferences for disabled-veteran owned small businesses.

HOUSING

Making Homeownership More Affordable for Veterans

- Increased the maximum VA home loan guarantee from \$203,000 to \$240,000.
- Provided permanent authority for reservists to use VA home loan program and reduced loan fees.
- Increased Veterans Mortgage Life Insurance (VMLI) coverage from \$90,000 to \$150,000.

Helping to Eradicate Homelessness Among Veterans

- Authorized a doubling of the number of Section 8 housing vouchers for homeless veterans.
- Authorized 10 new domiciliaries for homeless veterans programs.
- Increased funding for the homeless grant and per diem program and the homeless veterans reintegration program, which helps such veterans obtain employment.

TAXES, BUSINESS, AND LEGAL

Protecting the Financial and Legal Rights of Servicemembers

- Strengthened protections to allow servicemembers to terminate housing and automobile leases when they are ordered to new duty stations.
- Protected servicemembers and their families from eviction for failure to pay rent or from having automobiles repossessed while they are deployed on active duty.
- Protected servicemembers' legal standing in civil and administrative proceedings while they are on active duty.
- Prevented states from implementing specific forms of double taxation on the incomes of spouses of servicemembers.